

# THE MID-CONTINENT MAGAZINE

(Formerly The Southern Magazine.)

VOL. VI.

AUGUST, 1895.

No. 4.  
Old Series No. 84.

## INSKIP: A STORY.

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(Begun in May Number.)

### CHAPTER XIV.

#### SOME WINTER PASSAGES FROM HER DIARY.

*November 15.*—After their immemorial fashion the days slip by—somehow. I have rather decided that I have a kind of elemental artistic instinct, which has always made the winter landscape about Inskip yield me a separate æsthetic pleasure; it has always been a wholesome joy to me to look out upon the gloomy barren fields and shorn woods, and to listen to the foraging wind along the smoky bluffs. I have never felt the universal poetic lamentation over summer's going and winter's coming, to be quite sincere. I think the winter is beautiful—beautiful! So often have I felt myself in a kind of heart-lifting ecstasy, standing at the window looking out at the sharp, cold, black outline of the after-sunset horizon, with here the silhouetted limbs of a great pine, and there a curl of smoke from a tenant's cottage in the far woodland; I have stood often and watched it long and long, with a pleasure deep and satisfying, until the icy draught, stealing under the closed sash, caught my fingers and turned me back to the heap of blazing logs, there to find such cheer!

In these days my point of view has changed; I have become introspective; I feel the need of doing something which shall fully occupy me so as to

keep me from dreaming myself into despondency. I walk, ride, write, my journal grows voluminous with my confidences and bits of self-analysis. I write myself down in decorous phrase to achieve a sense of stability and settled opinion.

Even in this disappointment of mine I find the magnificence of the world's external beauty strangely appealing. It all seems instinct with an indeterminate melancholy sympathy.

Dudley is out shooting; I can hear his gun popping away down at the river.

*November 20.*—I am hardly of the same mind about Raymond for two hours at a time. Often there are periods when I lose every feeling but despair; sometimes inconsequent impulses of hope set tumultuous emotions to rioting. In the end I have almost given up the endeavor to set out a definite conclusion; resentment has become just grief.

I cannot deny, to myself, the truth of any intuition. I know that I still care for him and hope that he will come again, armored with nobly sufficient excuses.

I set about formulating these for him myself; I can't help eagerly advocating this or that. And I gradually lose faith in them all.

*November 27.*—I take long walks when the weather is fine; I am quite strong and wonderfully well. I usually go down the river road, through the

orchard and sedgefield. To-day I went nearly all the way to the river at the far end of the plantation, and gathered a wreath of the red berries that grow with the honeysuckle in the thicket by the upland fallow. I did not go too near the river; I have grown to hate the sound of its cold lapping murmur against the opposite gray bluffs. The crows made the place weird and uncanny, filling the ridges with their harsh clamorings.

*December 6.*—Aunt Hattie asked me to-day if I didn't want her to give me a house-party. The word gave me a fright; I felt as if I should be unable to protest enough. She asked: "Do you intend to be an old maid?"

"I am only twenty."

"You had better go out some."

"I go out every day."

"In society, I mean," she said. But I hate the word.

How far off seems last summer! How dream-like! Raymond! Raymond!

*December 10.*—To-day I had some callers; I saw them coming and slipped out into the green-house until Aunt Hattie, who went about the house looking for me, told them she supposed I had gone walking.

I feel so lonely, so guilty, with my secret and its doubts.

*December 16.*—It has been three months since I have had a word from Raymond.

*December 25.*—Christmas has been quiet and dreary at Inskip. Laura took dinner with us; she talked with Dudley at the table, and I sat in stupid silence while the others discussed the wild turkey Dudley killed. Dudley was quiet, almost wooden; he sat at dinner in a rather gloomy taciturnity with a white cravat, and his curling, black hair parted on one side, a healthy red spot in each cheek and his strong leathery face was unusually expressionless. (What a picture I have drawn in that sentence! It would give a false impression to any one else, but when I

read this again I shall get the portrait all right, I know.)

I had such a mawkish dream one night, not long ago. I thought Dudley and I were married and sat together somewhere, apart from the whole world; he looked as he did to-day, and I was trying so hard to say something to him and had nothing to say—I could never talk long with Dudley: it must be because we have so few things in common—and he looked at me with a kind of gloomy anxiety, just as a mother would look at her sick or delirious child. His eyes seemed to burn feverishly.

*January 6.*—It rained to-day. Laura was up to see me; we had the afternoon together. I can talk somewhat freely with Laura; it relieves me. But I don't think she feels the same about love and loyalty that I do. She has just gone away with Mr. Van Dusen, who drove up after the rain. She showed me the solitaire she had from him to-day. They are to be married next fall. I stood shivering out on the porch to watch them out of sight. It is nearing dusk. The crows are flying high and continuous against the gray in a seemingly endless line to the bluffs. How they clamor! How dreary the sodden world looks!

—I regret every trustful thing I have written him—every loving word I have ever said to him.

*January 8.*—I think perhaps he has gone to Paris again, so his letters may be delayed, or lost.

Or maybe he is too ill to write! I have been thinking about this all day.

*January 14.*—The solace I get from my sylvan excursions is of a most melancholy kind. Yet it is solace; it is employment.

I have heard nothing from Raymond.

*February 1.*—February is the harshest, dreariest month in the year. To-day has been somewhat less intolerable. The soft maples are blooming by the creek; I noticed that this afternoon:

their red blossoms proclaim that winter is broken. Yet how grimy and raw the world and the sky!

Laura rode with me to-day.

She said: "Are you trying to forget?"

"The effort sharpens memory," I said.

How miserable I am!

*February 3.*—The south wind blew up this morning, and there was a great deal of noise among the sparrows. Some violets bloomed in the shelter of the steps. As I rode out I found a sharp edge in the wind.

Dudley works hard at his canvass.

I asked him to-day: "Do you think you will win, Dudley?"

"Unless something happens."

*February 19.*—"Something" has happened.

*February 22.*—Spring seems to be here, in spite of the calendar. This Sunday morning is full of vernal suggestions. The sun breaks through the soft clouds now and then. I walked down to the creek, where the birds were chirping. There is greenness on the orchard and pastures—sheep-mint and small clover and the little low weeds with purple flowers. I could smell the fresh earth from the field over there, where yesterday they plowed; it mingled with the herby scent of incipient vegetation, brought out by the warm sunshine. The tomtits, warblers and red crossbeaks rioted in the yet leafless trees by the creek. But it is all very dull, and seems to mean so little.

Ah, what is it all for?

## CHAPTER XV.

### OF PAULINE.

Joe was humbly remonstrant, but Dudley would dress. He had waked in the middle of the afternoon, full of restless whims. It was the day of the primary election. He had heard no news from town. Pauline had not been near him, nor had he seen his mother since

noon. He felt able to walk about, and desirous of doing it. When black Joe had awkwardly helped him into his clothes and shaved him, the negro was sent away, and Dudley stalked slowly around the chamber, and finally started down stairs with his cigar, the first since he had been shot.

In the upper hall, striding noiselessly over the thick carpet, he gave a glance into Pauline's room and paused. She was standing by the window. He was about to call out to her cheerily; she turned partly around and he saw that she was in tears. She was alone in the room. He went back to his chamber with his head bent thoughtfully. There he sat watching the dozing log-fire, his hands clasping his knees.

On the ends of the logs the sap simmered, and in the fitful February way the wind riled about the corners of the house. The Gordon setter ran in with tail a-wag and thrust his sniffing cold nose up to his master's face. To Dudley's ears, from the turn of the stairs, came faintly the slow ticking of the clock; the meek and ceaseless chant of the cricket sounded from somewhere about the hearth.

A kindly and thoughtful young man, imperious in his manners and by instinct considerate: posture him to your mind; I give you this: A lean face touched with firelight, a leader's nose, deep-shadowed dark deliberative eyes, a powerful cleft chin not gracelessly curved, a drooping dark moustache, thick black hair curling about his ears, a tall white forehead much developed above the temples: a face and head fine looking, set on great shoulders. This was Dudley and that was a *mauvais quart d'heure* with him, you may well understand: sudden mounting re-animate hopes fallen from a great height, dashed!

The dun afternoon was ending lingeringly, with impulses of warm wind, as Dudley came down to supper.

His mother was concerned primarily about his health. "You must go right back to bed."

"Oh, I'm all right."

"Doesn't your shoulder hurt?"

"A little stiff."

"You'll start that wound."

"Nonsense, mother. Where's the Major?"

"Your father hasn't come home yet. I think he means to take supper in town. He's been absent all day."

"Where's Pauline?"

"She is not well."

"Isn't she coming down?"

"She doesn't know you are up."

"What's the matter with her?"

"She's moping."

"I saw her crying."

"You did? Did you speak to her?"

Dudley shook his head. "What's it all about?"

"She has had a letter."

"And from whom?"

"Mr. Raymond Lea."

"How do you know?"

"She let me read it."

Dudley turned an anxious face. "How did she happen to do that?"

"I was a little diplomatic."

"She has been so secretive."

"She wanted my sympathy."

"Did she tell you all?"

"Everything."

"What's the reason he hasn't written before?"

"Do eat your supper, Dudley. You ought to be in bed."

"Yes, yes," he said, impatiently.

"They were really engaged, were they?"

"Yes, they were engaged."

"Did she enjoin secrecy?"

"Not at all."

"You might tell me about it."

"Oh, he was quite eloquent."

"I've no doubt."

"He says he has been busy and overwhelmed with work, and all that, and now, since his play has failed—you knew that his play failed?"

"Yes."

"How did you know?"

"I saw the criticisms in the New York papers."

"You said nothing about it."

"I know. Go on."

"Well, he is repentant, and gives her to understand how wrong and foolish and sinful it was for him to neglect her so, and says he thinks more of her

now than he ever did, and so forth and so on."

"The long and short of which is that he is all broken up and wants—sympathy."

"That is just it, Dudley."

"Give me some coffee, please. When did Pauline get this letter?"

"This afternoon."

"Who's been to town?"

"Old Jim. I couldn't send Joe. Your father hasn't been home all day. Old Jim speaks of great excitement about the polls. His expression was 'Cu'is gwines-on.' I wonder—"

"What do you reckon Pauline intends to do?"

"The poor dear child! I am so distressed about this! I can hardly abide seeing her distressed so. And you saw her crying! She would lose her health if I didn't make her take long walks every day."

"But what do you think?"

"She thinks about him all the time."

"You don't know, then? What excuse for him has she been making to herself, all this time?"

"She rather fancied he was sick, or that his letters had got lost in the mail."

"Pitiable delusion!" Dudley frowned darkly. "And she was loyal and faithful," he added.

"Until this last," said his mother.

He floated away into thought, crumbling a bit of cake in his hand. Then he came back and brushed them into a pile.

"I must say it's rather fine for him to write her the precise truth."

"And why fine?"

"Most men would have lied—and successfully."

"Perhaps his candor was for effect."

"That may be."

"I am sure it was."

"It was risky, mother."

"He threw himself upon the court's mercy."

"He didn't need to."

"He knew how tender-hearted was his tribunal and how prejudiced in his favor."

"You must give the devil his due, mother."

"He *is* a devil," she said, bitterly.

"He doesn't lack the cleverness to get up a plausible lie."

"The truth serves him better."

"Why has she been so secretive?"

"He stopped her mouth, as you suggested."

"Why?"

"He didn't want their engagement known until the play was produced."

"For which he had his reasons, did he?"

"I didn't quite understand them; they struck me as being flimsy."

"Like his devotion," said Dudley, with a touch of savageness.

"Like his devotion!" Mrs. Stuart repeated, with equal bitterness.

The vehemence of her swift echo brought from him the inquiry, "Mother, you didn't advise her against Lea, did you?"

"I told her I was incompetent to advise." To her conscience Mrs. Stuart said, "That's true." She did not say to her son that she had added impulsively to Pauline, "I would send him to Guinea!"

"Well, that was right," said Dudley, much relieved.

"I don't know what she intends to do."

"She will be like a small craft on a heaving sea."

"It will be the old fight between love and pride," said Mrs. Stuart.

"She cares for him, after all."

"Yes," said Mrs. Stuart, looking absently away.

"Did she seem decided about answering his letter?"

"She was doubtful until I—"

"Now, what did you do, mother?"

"I told her she had very little pride if she answered his letters at all."

"After telling her you were incompetent to advise her!"

"And then she got rigid, and said she would not answer his letters if he wrote repeatedly. And this will be all, Dudley. He won't write again, and she won't answer him if he does, and she will get over all this, and things will be all right."

"Do you know, I rather believe Lea is honest in what he says?"

"What if he is?"

"If Pauline cares for him she ought to marry him."

"Marry—cat's-foot! Don't you know he wouldn't make a decent husband for her?"

"I can't say that I do."

"If he gives her over to oblivion within three months after getting engaged to her, what is there to assure us he won't go philandering around after—"

"There are things," said Dudley, "there are things in men's lives which completely revolutionize them and shake up the foundations of their selfishness. I have been looking for just such a happening in Lea's life, and—"

"Pah!" said Mrs. Stuart. After a moment she returned to the old argument: "I want her to marry you."

"She would be happier with the man she really fancies."

"You wear out my patience, Dudley. It isn't the way you act so much as the way you talk."

"I talk as I feel."

"Your scruples are morbid."

"They are at least honest."

"I tell you again, in the course of time Pauline will get over this."

"And then?"

"She will marry you."

"You think that?"

"She thinks more of you than she does of anyone else in the world."

Dudley smiled bitterly.

"Your summary is quite distasteful."

"Now, why are you so provoking?"

"It suggests the villain in the piece," Dudley answered.

"Why 'villain?'"

"The one that pursues the heroine by strategy and force, though she tells him to his face that she abhors him."

"I must go and see if Pauline would like a little hot broth—I do not see the slightest comparison," Mrs. Stuart added.

"It is merely a flavor, a suggestion. I—I don't like it," said Dudley.

"You must go to bed," his mother rejoined.

## CHAPTER XVI.

A LETTER OF FRIENDSHIP AND A RIDE  
BY NIGHT.

That night in his room Dudley smoked several pipes over the subject before the soft glow of the coals. Some words his mother had used came back to him and made him wince with a sense of culpability far different from that which she had intended to impress. "It isn't the way you act so much as the way you talk." He summed up his doubts in an inward probe, thrusting relentlessly.

"Can my solicitude for her happiness be mere idle wishing, hoping; just lip-twaddle, cheaper than pipe-smoke?"

The inquiry recalled to him that he had long since ceased his praising to Pauline of Lea, his friend; he had scarce opened his lips about him for months. The remembrance burned in his mind, as the memory of all his ungenerous deeds of doing and not doing did in time.

He lighted his student-lamp and presently fell to writing with a convalescent's eagerness; and before he had ceased he had written a long letter to Lea, all of personal talk and kindly questions about his friend's work, ambitions, prospects: he said he would like to see the libretto of the play. He did not say why he had not written before, or ask why his own last letter had not been answered; he proceeded on the tacit agreement that the lapse in their correspondence was not to imply a breach in their intimate relationship, for periods much longer had often elapsed between their letters; it was quite an institution of theirs to maintain no responsibility for the ellipses in their correspondence.

Toward the end of the letter he wrote:

You may have seen some note in the dispatches about the rather peculiar events of my campaign, which ended with the closing of the polls this evening. I believe I talked over with you the possibility of my succeeding my uncle. I became involved in a fracas down town, and the side I took happened to be the unpopular one, and so they are down on me. I estimate Galt's majority in to-day's primaries at six or seven thousand. I don't know yet what the figures are; I've been laid up with a pistol wound, for a few days,

and couldn't fight my own battle. Galt is a loud-mouthed demagogue from Coytee county, who, I dare say, has left no variety of political chicanery untried. My lieutenant and political stand-by, Van Dusen, has gone back on me, and my organization has gone to pot.

I shall take a good long holiday after this; I am fond of holidays, you know, and if you find time I would be more than glad to have you run down and see me; I am prepared to make your stay interesting; I've got a new pup—she's got talent. I want to have a talk with you about your play, too. I saw it given quite a slashing in a New York paper. But you know I never had any faith in the average dramatic critic, anyway. Come down. I can appreciate you, if the critics and theatergoers won't.

— Yours as ever,  
DUDLEY STUART.

Dudley was careful to avoid mentioning Pauline's name in any connection; he perceived that in all delicacy she must not be made appear party to the invitation.

"Well, she wants him," he said to himself aloud, thus crudely clarifying his purpose in writing the letter. "When he's on the ground"—the thump of his fist sealing the letter broke off speech.

His call for "Joe!" fetched his black servitor from the hall.

"Yes, suh!"

"Saddle my black filly and bring her around to the front, on the grass, mind."

"You gwine town, Mist' Dudley?"

"Yes."

"You ain' got strenk, Mist' Dudley!"

"Mind your place, Joe."

"Yes, suh. Lemme go wif ye, Mist' Dudley!"

"Well. Take any horse you like—ride ahead and meet me in the alley behind the post-office."

"Yes, suh!"

"No noise, now."

"No, suh; I ain' gwine make no noise."

Dudley muffled himself in a loose riding-coat with a deep cape and high collar; he rarely wore this into town and he knew that he would scarcely be recognized.

Some minutes later he was riding down through the night to St. Giles.

It became a wild enough night, for all that it had begun still and filled

with smoky mists. The wind came forth again, wanton and fitful; it blew turbulently through the bare, dry branches of the oaks. Infrequent rifts in the sable flying wrack in the great sky showed shining white stars. As Dudley rode into the turnpike a rampant gust seized him from behind, blowing the cape of his ulster about his ears, and went crying up the slopes of the dark woods. From far ahead on the roadway, on which the wind blew up a dust which he could smell, not see, came the intermittent clatter of horses' hoofs, always preceding him, and always at his horse's heels, like hasty, sinister footsteps, the old dead leaves rustled across the roadway, blown hither, blown thither; and riding so, Dudley came into the outskirts of St. Giles. There, in the white rays of the arc lights, the overhead wires threw trailing snaky shadows in the dusty avenue—waving tracks, up which careened the monster shadows of pigmy beetles. Shutters of silent houses creaked and slammed; magnolia gardens yielded a hollow husky rustle. Here dogs crept noiselessly around corners, and a gray cat crossed the road and ran along a picket fence, its soft coat ruffled in the wind. Dry leaves and campaign hand-bills rattled in the gutters. The filly's footsteps echoed loudly in the street, and once, from that part of the city whence the glare seemed thrown, came the cheering of multitudes.

He shivered with a half-angry, half-sick sensation of loneliness and trepidation; a pain shot through his wounded shoulder, and he had a nauseous qualm that bespoke failing strength. These feelings he crushed by an effort of his will, and rode rapidly forward into the city. The streets grew populous with noisy crowds; a smell of burning tar was in the air. He spurred his horse, which leaped responsively.

Turning the corner of the post-office square, he saw a dense crowd about the "Examiner" office, which fronted the post-office. A bonfire composed of tar-barrels was burning in the street. There was an occasional wave of cheers, succeeded by yells and cat-calls, and a

man with his hand full of yellow papers was chalking bulletins on the "Examiner" blackboard.

Dudley rode quickly past the corner and turned into an alley, where Joe awaited him.

As he came out of the alley on foot, two men were joining the crowd from the side street; he heard one of them cursing and swearing; the other exclaimed: "I knowed old 'Squair Malone as well as I know my brother. I'm in favor of gittin' up a private hangin' party for this other damn' scoundrel, yit!"

Dudley felt in his pocket to see if his pistol was safe, and, pushing down his hat and covering his jaws with his coat-collar, made his way through the tumultuous gathering to the post-office.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE MUSIC IN THE STREET.

Laura had come with her mother and others to hear the election returns in the "Examiner's" editorial rooms, which overlooked the street. Van Dusen, coming in with a hospitable general salutation and his hands full of dispatches, said to her: "Excuse my shirt sleeves. I hardly thought you'd come."

"Why?"

"Oh, you're such a maid for style, form—the proprieties."

"Mamma's here."

"So! I hadn't seen her."

"She thinks you're awful, Sid."

"She's right."

"You must behave to-night."

"I've been trying to get to see you all day, but the devil intervened."

"Why, Sid!"

"This devil." Van Dusen took some dispatches from a tousled, inky, aproned youth who appeared before him. A wild yell broke outside.

"What's that for?"

"This telegram's been posted."

"Do let me see it."

Laura was reading aloud from the yellow slip when Major Stuart came up panting: "What's that? What's that?"

"Galt is defeated in Coytee county by ten votes," repeated Laura, loudly.

"You don't say so!" The Major went fussing noisily about the room with the news.

"I wanted to tell you all about the developments," said Van Dusen. "It was after both mail and city editions had gone to press that Sims—that's the reporter, you know; we've only one—came in with the news that it was not Jack Hyde at all, but a negro preacher, named 'Lige Crowder, that committed the Malone murder. Major Stuart had secretly put the case in the hands of private detectives. Well, you should have seen me hustling! I sent out fifty telegrams."

"To spread the news?"

"It was in every voting precinct in the district by ten o'clock. Crowder confessed at half past three."

"Papa said it would greatly affect the result."

"It will probably elect Stuart."

"Why do they yell so over this telegram about Coytee county?"

"Why, Dudley wins! They're for Dudley now, you may be sure."

"But ten votes!"

"The point is, it's Galt's home county. Stuart never did expect to carry it."

"Have you heard how Mr. Dudley is to-day?"

"No. The old man's been in town since daylight. I sent him word. He didn't tell Dudley."

"What a glorious surprise it will be!"

"The Major's been flying around the polls in his carriage like a red comet, persuading, swearing; he's done his part. I hope I've made amends to Dudley myself. I'm dog-tired."

"But, Sid, he struck you."

"Who hit Brander Galt?"

"What a noise! Do see what the latest is."

"Sims is figuring on the total result. I'm worn out myself. Drat it!" He sprang to his feet and went to the speaking-tube, which whistled shrilly.

"Well?"—"Six?"—"And how many counties to hear from?"—"Good!"

Turning, he shouted across the room:

"With only one county to hear from, the returns from which could not possibly change the result, Stuart receives the nomination for Congress by an estimated majority of over six thousand!"

In the hubbub that followed Laura called Van Dusen to the window: "Look there!"

"Where?"

"On the steps."

"The man going into the post-office?"

"Yes!"

"The man with the cape-coat?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, what about him?"

"Don't you recognize him?"

"His shape is something like Stuart's."

"It is Mr. Dudley!"

Van Dusen stood up in the window. Laura plucked nervously at his coat. Then she withdrew from sight; he was speaking.

"Fellow-citizens and members of my ancient and honorable party!"

The last two words, mouthed with oratorical enunciation, 'hon'rab'le pahtee!' rang lingeringly and clear above the heads in the street. A check came upon the noise; a tin trumpet blared and there were sharp cries of "Silence!" A voice cried "Down in front!"

"My countrymen," said the young editor, with measured syllables, "the heart of the multitude is always ready to render noble and poetic justice to a noble-hearted man!"

"When it understands him!" called some one, gayly; then followed a half-laugh, half-cheer, which the whole street took up, seeing Van Dusen speaking at the window. The noise, not its portent, penetrated to Dudley, who stood at the letter-box with the missive to Lea in his hand, indifferent to the noise outside and at the last irresolute. But only for a moment, and when it was past he resolutely shoved it into the drop-letter slot.

The crucial moment was over. He turned away, drawing his overcoat collar higher about his neck. "That settles it. When Lea's on the ground he will make it all right. Lea will make it all right. She wants him—my God! She wants him!" The formulation of

These phrases gave him a vague relief. His hand was passed over his forehead to brush away the cold sweat.

Fresh cheers broke out in the street. "They take a lot of satisfaction in beating me," he said to himself; but he was wondering more at his own indifference; he seemed irreducible to the Dudley Stuart of the fierce and brawling canvass.

He traversed the post-office corridor and came to the open door. In the street there was a roar of laughter and a prolonged general yell. It seemed to Dudley an airy and inconsequent dream.

It was his own name he heard! It rose on the wave of a mighty cheer.

"Why, it's Van Dusen that's speaking!" Dudley drew into the shadow of the door-post.

Van Dusen raised his voice at his peroration: "Under these circumstances, my fellow-citizens, it is with the highest gratification that I announce to you that our estimates, based on reliable telegraphic returns, place Mr. Stuart's majority safely above six thousand, with only one county to hear from."

"Hooraw for Van Dusen!"

"Long live the Stuart dynasty!"

A tin horn shot a mighty blast, a long swelling roar began, and down the streets, with a quick premonitory drumming, came an itinerant band. Though drowned by the volume of cheers it began to play.

There came a sweet lull in the noise, and to the ears of the crowd there stole the strains of a magical martial air. The cornets danced the music into the night; the reeds piped and trebled the dulcet military measure; the brasses blared and the kettle-drum purred out boldly the little roulade that cheered the charge at Gettysburg.

Look away! Look away! Look away!

A stalwart dark young planter from the cotton-bottoms tossed his broad hat aloft and yelled lustily down the street, "Glory to God!"

The cheers broke forth like the crash of falling timber. Hats and canes waved above the mouthing mass, and some one who was both sturdy-lunged and loyal began shouting Dudley Stuart's

full name. Catching it quickly the crowd swelled it into a rugged chant; it rocked up and down the street in tumultuous waves. The cornets sang, the reeds fluted, cheered at each rising strain of their mystic call.

For in Dixie land I'll take my stand,  
I'll fight and die for Dixie land,  
Look away! Look away! Look away!

That refrain beat in Dudley's brain when, past midnight, he was once more out in the dark and silent country, riding home to Inskip. Turning in his saddle, he looked back at St. Giles, with its yellow flare against the black sky. On a rising breath of wind he heard again a cheer, and a strain of the old music. He yet remembered the fierce joy he had taken in the campaign because Pauline had bidden him embrace his opportunity. "She will be up, waiting to hear the returns. I shall see her to-night! I shall see her!" He repeated the words with a wild impulse of unreasoning passion, spurring forward at a reckless gallop. His nostrils sniffed the breath of the dark woods; the scent of pine, of sleeping spring wild flowers, came on the night wind. A dog barked at a roadside hovel, where a yellow light awaited the return of the hovel's master with the election news. Dudley galloped past, unconsciously intolerant of the smell of human habitation; his nostrils were unsated with the balm of herbs and roots.

Then he pulled his horse up into a walk, and let the reins sway; recalled the letter he had written Lea, and soberly questioned his own sanity. A night-mareish procession of regrets and approvals trooped through his mind, now grown feverish with undue exertion. Exorcising these doubtings, and fetching somewhat of faith in his course, came the picture of Pauline, gazing through tears into a moist and melancholy sky. . . . It was for her!

So this was the guise of his desire (love too passionate to die, too tender to be selfish)—this was the fruitage of his ruthless chivalry, that fate should take the tribute so yielded from out his utmost need, and burn it into ashes at

that altar, all in the flush of his popular success: a drama in the background, a sacrificial shrine amid the night, and his heart's night, and that one idea fixed forever in its firmament like a star or a song—holding to it in no false dramatic fever, but out of the patience of a steadfast heart, tender and faithful until the end.

Observe, the man was no sentimentalist. He obeyed his impulses. They pointed out a practical kindness to a woman he loved.

Hither and thither across the roadway hurled last year's leaves.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE ANATOMY OF A MENTAL CONCEIT.

Riding into St. Giles on the little branch railroad, Raymond Lea was harassed by a figure of speech. Relentless with its sting came the sense of his ignominious defeat, taking body in the ever recurring fancy, now grown grimly accurate and phrased, "Jilted!" The conceit had taken birth when in tired moments his conscience had slipped upon him, prying into the tender places, and he had foiled it with inward juggles. In those times he forewent much of his intimate self-searching, saying to himself with unreckoning lightness, "another mistress than the woman seduces me!"

The figure came trivially and inanely; it struck him as valuable only as suggesting a motif for a poem or a dramatic idyl; he made a passing mental note: something might be made of that, that way. But it had given its own character to the living situation which encompassed him; and that too he set aside for artistic consideration, where his conscience might not sit in judgment and render a decree against his tranquillity.

But these things had not played a large part in the swift life of devoted endeavor he had led through the winter. His best impression of that time was that he had been totally absorbed. Into that frame of mind upholding such confidence in his work as he had

felt then he could not now re-enter. His own culpable heartlessness he could scarcely understand or believe.

In the comfortless realization of DeWine's despised prophesy of absolute failure, the fancy of dramatic art as a new mistress superseding the flesh and blood became a bitter thing, a memorial of now unintelligible fatuity barren of poetic charm; the strange mistress had lured to spurn and dishonor him.

He sat in mental chaos, lonely and hungry at heart, looking out on the spring world, which was green and brown. The pale sunlight sifted through the dusty car window and warmed the soiled seats. The buzzing figure of speech came back to him, and stung him again and again.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### MANIFESTS THE HEART'S RETURN AND THE VIRTUE OF CANDOR.

Pauline had been somewhat unwell; she had caught a cold from exposure in the damp spring woods on one of her long walks. Laura came out from town on her black horse and found her convalescent; she rode away in the mid-afternoon, leaving her friend enthroned and looking very sweet and pale among pillows near the open doorway in the hall. She wore a bright dressing-sacque and the kindly sunshine fell about her small feet.

It was a bright afternoon with a bit of breeze and clear cool shadows over the intensely green grass. Lying yet for the most part in the jurisdiction of winter, the woods were gray-blue. The crows had not yet migrated, but the air bore tales of plum-trees blooming somewhere, and birds were chirping about the vines in the porch. In the doorway vista, through a break in the bare oaks, a peach-tree was visible on the distant hillside, turned to a great pink bouquet.

It was very still. Little existed, little occurred, to break the tranquil quietude. Mrs. Stuart was rummaging in the green-house; Dudley and the

Major were in town. The clock in the turn of the stairs ticked slowly out the leisurely hours; a few house-flies buzzed in the sunshine, which crept along the floor. The setter, stretched at full length there, raised his muzzle to snap them at intervals. Once, when Pauline thought she heard hoof-beats, he arose and stood motionless, looking down the drive intently, then dropped his jaw and wagged his tail, then pointed again and lay down. Later he ran out and down the drive, muffling a growl in his throat.

A quick foot crunched the gravel, clicked on the steps and gained the threshold. Pauline's pulse rolled as from a released spring touched by the words "Down, Hector!" in a voice she had called lost.

Lea strode in, grasping hat and gloves, his right hand extended in wordless entreaty. Her tripping heart flashed radiance through her eyes; her hand went out to him; she gasped in tender surprise, "Raymond!"

Then she grew white and cold with recollection.

"You are ill?" His devouring glance comprehended the pillows, the smelling salts, the call-bell. His face was very pale.

Her lips moved: "A little."

"You are better?"

"Than I have been."

He dragged up a chair; he felt like kneeling.

To fill the dread silence she added, "I am almost well."

How loudly the clock ticked!

Inwardly Lea fought with the overwhelming stress of the situation's awkwardness.

"You had my—letter—Pauline?"

Her great brown eyes evaded him. The color kept away from her lips. She plucked nervously at some fancy work: "Yes."

He stood out through the shock of his embarrassment, which beat upon him like a storm.

"Did you quite understand what I wrote you?"—he added—"dear!" and bent close.

She was mute, bending to the tangle of her crochet.

Her refusal to answer somewhat calmed him. He made a beginning.

"You cannot understand how penitent I am, dear." The quivering passion and tenderness of his deep voice drew a fleeting glance from her.

She murmured, as one might in a dream, "You cannot understand how much you have made me—suffer!"

"I can! I can! I do! I have suffered for that myself."

Her rejoinder was primitive. "You forget."

"It was for that I suffered, as I suffer now."

"Not for wounded pride!"

"Pride?"

"You have killed me!"

"Pauline! If you will let me I will show you how rich amend I can make—" The words rang cheap and bombastic in his own ear, breaking his utterance.

She moaned: "Raymond, please go away from me! Go back and forget again!"

"Don't say that!" Her use of his Christian name gave him reasonless hope.

"Go on back now!"

"Without telling you, dear—"

"There can be nothing more."

"I have not told you all."

"I understand all."

"Ah, you do not—you cannot!"

"Your letter was clear."

"I wanted to be so honest."

"I have not questioned your word."

"You make it so hard for me."

Her needle flew, aggravating the tangle.

"I mean," he said, "that in my letter I was so determined to be perfectly honest that—" He passed his hand over his hair.

She questioned with a quick glance.

"I thought that point out, coming down," he said, with a passing touch of deliberation. "People rarely put the exact truth in such confessions."

"But you did."

"And so I think that perhaps—"

She ended his nervous pause with an intense "Well?"

"Pauline, I can't master any tact!"

—that, perhaps, you deem the exact truth even worse."

Chill pride stood in her cheeks.

"The face of your letter was—"

"Bad enough?"

"Cruel!"

"Was it so cruel, then? You believed in me till that letter came?"

"I could not but doubt you a little before, but—"

"But?" eagerly.

"For the most part I thought you, thought you—loyal. I clung to the assurances in that other last letter."

"And I was such a brute!"

"Was this what you came down to tell me?"

"I have come to tell you how changed I am! how shaken I am! I love you, more than ever I loved you before!"

She kept a busy silence; he did not see what havoc she had made of her work.

He turned and looked away through the open door, through which came the warm breath of the spring. She took furtive note of his pallor, and the nervous tapping of his white fingers on the chair. He had not removed his overcoat, and still grasped his gloves.

"I feel that," he said—to her it sounded like some one talking a long way off—"I feel that, more than anything else, except, may be, the immeasurable depth to which I have been lowered in my own self-esteem." His words were calm, a little tremulous. "The fiasco of my ambitious endeavor brought home to me the magnitude of my selfishness. I beat empty-handed the futile spaces of the future, with the prize of personal distinction denied me. Then I saw what a really small thing that prize was and how fine and good was the other thing that had come into my life and—"

"And how you had undervalued it," she said, immediately regretting it.

His passion broke forth: "For you, dear—I have sunk to where I can only lift my eyes to you! I have been as false to myself as I have been to you. I know in my soul now, that I care for you—I shall think of you tenderly always. I haven't allowed myself any

hopes; I have blindly crushed them. I have—I had—only cherished a determination to let you know how severely I have been punished for my disloyalty—my Nemesis has laid hard hands upon me. I must tell you—you must believe it!—it has given me a true vision of the relative worth of love and selfish ambition. It has made me better while it humiliated me. I want you to know how far above me I think you and how deeply penitent I am—how deeply penitent!"

A strange thrill crept over her, benumbing her resentment. She had struggled with the yearning to accept his explanation and take faith in his passionate protestations; it had beset her ever since his letter came. She had shaken it off savagely; the stress of his presence revived it.

And, after all, potent factor setting at naught sharp jousts of fond reason and pride, she loved him! The sense of his longed-for presence had a gladness of its own, despite discoveries and confessions. It carried with it a train of tenderness for him, and best of all, he had bared his heart to her. Such bravery was surely the shield of worthy, nay, sincere devotion! She recalled the words of his letter: "I could not come to you dissembling in the least." How easily he might have done so! She divined that his love was too deep for any expeditious deception.

Being human she had doubted; being tender she forgave.

She had broken her needle, and sat, small forefinger upon lip, in dew-eyed silence. He consumed her with eager eyes. How alluring she was, this dark-eyed pale woman! Gloom crept into the hall-corners; the sun swung low, spreading a scarlet fan. Lea clasped her hand. "Have you no tenderness left for me? Pauline, can you forgive me?"

"There—there was—no one—no one else?"

"No woman? None! Myself! A self-centered brute!"

She did not now withdraw her hand.

"Can you," he went on impetuously, "can you—I hardly dared hope I might ask this—can you take me back—"

let me be what I was? I can not believe now there was ever a time when you were not all to me—it lived in my heart, somehow—I scarcely know what I am saying! I do love you, Pauline—I have wanted you so much—I hold you so high above me. Tell me, can you believe me?"

She struggled to recover her hand, desisted, sat trembling, saying in despair of scorn:

"Oh, Raymond"—the dear voice broke—"you know how I care for you!"

Dudley Stuart came riding home in the soft spring dusk. In a kind of golden daze Lea met him at the hall-door, where he came flecking the dust from his boots with his whip.

"Ah, Lea, why didn't you let me know exactly when? I suspected today—wasn't sure. Put it there! I knew you were here when I saw that livery nag in the carriage-way. I'm glad to see you—mighty glad. We'll go out on that trip to-morrow early. Hello, Pauline, glad you're able to be up. Here, Ray, give me your check and I'll send for your trunk and have that stove-up nag taken back to his stable. You shouldn't ride such stock. You'd better be off up to your room and fix up for supper, though you don't seem to need it. You're nothing short of a dude. I'm proud to see you."

Mrs. Stuart, entering the rear hall, caught sight of Lea's back as he was mounting the stair-case. She knew him, and stood speechless, until Dudley caught her about the waist and laughingly whirled her aside to explain.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE MAN IN THE BACKGROUND.

The wedding took place at Inskip in June, long after Dudley had been officially made Congressman. He refused to act as best man, declaring his faith in some ancient code interdicting widowers. Ran Dewine came down in time to fill the office, phlegmatic and profoundly congratulatory. He and Dudley became fast friends from the start.

On the night of the wedding the house was covered inside with smilax and ivy; the stately old dining-room was ablaze with yellow and scarlet roses, and punch was brewed there in a great old silver bowl. All the family relations came, with more beside, and some of Lea's southern kinspeople came, too, and the turnpike echoed all night with rolling wheels and the driveway under the oaks gleamed with carriage-lights. Everybody said that it was a very sweet wedding; they were sure (with the poor memory that nuptial guests have for previous affairs of the sort) that they had never seen one more particularly so. Miss Meriwether stood up with the bride, and old Mammy Nanny, who watched the ceremony from the dining-room with tears and lip-twitching and exclamations of "Ain' dat sweet?" had the privilege (in which she was assisted by Jack Hyde, now rehabilitated as Dudley's valet) of shaking infinite quantities of rice upon the couple as they entered the carriage for the train, the departure being made amid much laughter and tears and an avalanche of good-wishes.

Riding down in the carriage, Lea's first words, when the sweet embarrassment of the intimate moment was over, were: "You know it was Dudley who opened up the avenue to me, after all?"

Pauline pleaded, "Oh, don't speak of that!" breaking off into, "You would not have come back?" shivered out in terror of past emergency.

"I had come to dreary despair. Oh, my sweetheart! my wife! dear old Dudley!"

Her cheek close to his, she repeated after him, looking back at the lights of Inskip, "Dear old Dudley!"

Mrs. Stuart chatted with her son, plucking her reception finery. He avoided generalizations, not to her surprise. "If he wanted it that way, why, all right." To herself she said this, pressing him to finish the punch.

"You're a pernicious old lady," he said, and declined, and kissed her good night.

Going up the vine-wreathed staircase he found a smile somehow fixed about his face; the muscles of his mouth were tired with it. A rage seized upon him; he cursed aloud, and afterwards in his room he wrote out his resignation as a member of the National House of Representatives. With the envelope in his hand, addressed to the Speaker of the House, he sat sore-hearted, debating.

The windows grew gray. He put out the lamp and arose with a laugh.

"No, I won't do that; I won't resign, I reckon. I'll—I'll stick it out. Maybe it won't be so bad, and I can learn to work for work's sake. Fate's too knotty. I must be at harmony with

life. I suppose it couldn't have been otherwise, possibly. I must put this ill-humor from me utterly . . . .

Ah! daybreak . . . . bird-song, and squirrels barking, and dripping dew—smell of mint and roses—there's the sun wheeling up—daybreak all over the hills: the same old hills, the same old familiar beauty I've waked on always. Pauline gone! But beauty's left—friends—fair fields—shall I turn my face? . . . . Perhaps I can live this thing down—forget! By God, I will!"

Standing by the window he deliberately tore the resignation into strips.

And so the long day began, and this is really the end of the tale.



